

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MASERU
AMEMBASSY MBABANE
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AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DURBAN 0304

CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SF
SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE: INDIAN SOUTH AFRICANS

REF: CAPE TOWN 355

1. THE FOLLOWING IS AN ADDITIONAL REPORT IN THE "PROSPECTS FOR
CHANGE" SERIES DEALING WITH INDIAN SOUTH AFRICANS:

2. SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION: INDIAN SOUTH AFRICAN FACE A
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SERIES OF CRUCIAL POLITICAL DECISIONS IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS.
UNTIL RECENTLY MOST INDIANS ACTED AS PASSIVE OBSERVERS OF
THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE NATIONALISM, SEEKING TO
ANTAGONIZE NEITHER GROUP BECAUSE OF THEIR TENUOUS MIDDLE
POSITION. HOWEVER THE NEW SAG CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS, THE
OCTOBER 19 BANNINGS AND FORMATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK
ALLIANCE (SABA), IN ADDITION TO INCREASED FOREIGN PRESSURES,

HAVE MADE INDIANS A POLITICALLY MORE SIGNIFICANT SWING GROUP COURTED BY BOTH WHITES AND BLACKS. THE SAG, ANXIOUS FOR ACCEPTANCE OF THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS AND INDIAN-COLORED SUPPORT AGAINST THE AFRICAN MAJORITY, HAS WOODED THE INDIANS WITH PROMISES OF SEPARATE BUT EQUAL POLITICAL RIGHTS IN THEIR OWN PARLIAMENT. THE SABA, ON THE OTHER HAND, AIMS AT LEAST IN PART AT CHECKING THE SAG'S GOAL OF INCLUDING INDIANS (AND COLOREDS) WITHIN THE LAAGER. HOW INDIAN POLITICAL LEADERS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE CURRENT SYSTEM REACT TO THEIR NEW ROLES ON POLITICAL CENTER STAGE, AND HOW THEY ASSESS THEIR LONG AND SHORT TERM INTERESTS, WILL DETERMINE THE COMMUNITY'S POLITICAL FUTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA. END SUMMARY.

3. THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN COUNCIL: THREE GROUPS, THE CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN COUNCIL (SAIC), THE REFORM PARTY, AND THE NATAL INDIAN CONGRESS (NIC), REPRESENT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF INDIAN POLITICAL OPINION. THE CONSERVATIVE SAIC LEADERSHIP REPRESENTS IN THE MAIN OLDER, BUSINESS-ORIENTED INDIANS WHO HAVE CULTIVATED GOOD RELATIONS AND CLOSE TIES WITH WHITES AND WHO FEAR AFRICAN POTENTIAL FOR ANTI-INDIAN VIOLENCE. ALTHOUGH THE SAIC REJECTED THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS IN NOVEMBER, 1977, IT WAS NOT BECAUSE THEY FELT THE PROPOSALS FELL SHORT OF THEIR ASPIRATIONS. (ON THE CONTRARY MOST ADMITTED THEY WERE A MAJOR STEP FORWARD FOR THE INDIAN COMMUNITY.) HOWEVER THEIR FEAR OF AFRICAN ANGER AND/OR REPRISALS AND HOPE FOR EVEN BETTER TERMS FROM A SAG ANXIOUS FOR

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THEIR SUPPORT FORMED THE OVERRIDING MOTIVATION. THERE HAVE BEEN SIGNS, SUCH AS P.W. BOTHA'S PROMISE OF FURTHER CONSULTATIONS WITH SAIC LEADERS (CAPE TOWN A-20), THAT THE LATTER TACTICS MAY BE WORKING, ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHAT REAL CONCESSIONS (IF ANY) THE SAG MAY MAKE.

4. IN LATE 1977 THE SAIC LEADERSHIP ADOPTED FOR THE FIRST TIME A "HARD LINE" ON THE LACK OF SAG RESPONSIVENESS TO INDIAN REQUESTS FOR CHANGE. AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF QUIET COOPERATION THIS NEW "MILITANCE" APPARENTLY TOOK THE SAG SOMEWHAT ABACK. INDIAN AFFAIRS MINISTER MARAIS STEYN TOLD THE LEADERS THAT THE SAG WOULD FULFILL MOST OF THEIR REQUESTS ONCE FUNDS WERE AVAILABLE AND THAT THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS WERE STILL OPEN TO INDIAN INPUT. THE SAIC ACCEPTED THIS STATEMENT BUT IMPLIED IT WOULD CONTINUE TO MANIPULATE THE SAG'S DESIRE FOR INDIAN SUPPORT TO WRING FURTHER SAG CONCESSIONS. A RECENT SAG PROMISE TO PERMIT MORE FOREIGN-BORN INDIAN WIVES TO IMMIGRATE, A DECISION TO INTRODUCE COMPULSORY INDIAN EDUCATION NEXT YEAR, AND INDIAN AFFAIRS MINISTER MARAIS STEYN'S CONFIRMATION IN PARLIAMENT OF THE OTHER CONCESSIONS, IMPROVEMENTS, AND POLICY CHANGES CONVEYED TO THE SAIC (DURBAN A-14) REPRESENT FURTHER SAG COMPROMISES. HOWEVER NATIONAL PARTY MP PAUL VILJOEN'S SUB-

SEQUENT PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT, THAT IT WAS "THE HOUR OF TRUTH" FOR INDIANS TO DECIDE WHETHER THEY WOULD "FOLLOW THE ROAD WITH WHITES" OR SUPPORT BLACK POWER AND BLACK MAJORITY RULE, SUGGESTS THE SAG'S PATIENCE IS LIMITED AND IT EXPECTS RECIPROCAL INDIAN COMPROMISES AND SUPPORT.

5. THE SAIC CONSERVATIVES MUST MOVE VERY CAREFULLY IN THE SHORT TERM. THEY ACCEPT THAT THE SAG WILL LIKELY PERMIT ONLY RELATIVELY MINOR CHANGES IN ITS CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS. THEY ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT BY COOPERATING TOO CLOSELY WITH THE SAG THEY RISK ALIENATING BOTH THE AFRICANS AND THE SMALL RADICAL ELEMENT OF THE INDIAN POPULATION. AS A RESULT THE PRESENT SAIC STANCE IS TO MAINTAIN A STANDOFFISH POSTURE ON THE PROPOSALS WHILE SIGNALLING TO THE SAG THEIR ESSENTIAL AGREEMENT WITH THE UNDERLYING
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PHILOSOPHY. IN THE LONGER TERM THE SAIC LEADERSHIP HAS RELATIVELY LITTLE HOPE OF PRESERVING THIS ROLE ONCE INDIAN ELECTIONS ARE HELD. THEY ARE CURRENTLY DISCREDITED AMONG THE BULK OF THE POPULATION BECAUSE OF THEIR PAST CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE SAG. BUT AS LONG AS THEY HOLD THEIR APPOINTIVE POSITIONS, THE SAG WILL DEAL WITH THEM AS THE COMMUNITY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESMEN. AS A RESULT THEY HAVE THE CURRENT POTENTIAL, THROUGH A CAREFUL USE OF TACTICS, OF GAINING MORE FOR THE INDIAN COMMUNITY THAN IT PREVIOUSLY HOPED FOR UNDER WHITE RULE.

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6. THE REFORM PARTY: IN ITS ONE YEAR OF FORMAL EXISTENCE THE REFORM PARTY HAS EVOLVED FROM A SMALL ANTI-SAG SPLINTER GROUP WITHIN THE SAIC INTO A PARTNER IN SABA AND THE CURRENT FAVORITE TO CAPTURE THE LEADERSHIP OF AN ELECTED SAIC OR INDIAN PARLIAMENT. MODELLING ITS CONSTITUTION, STRATEGY, AND TACTICS ON THE COLORED LABOR PARTY'S EXPERIENCE IN THE COLORED REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL, THE REFORM PARTY HAS CAPTURED THE MIDDLE GROUND OF INDIAN POLITICS. IT IS WITHIN THE SYSTEM, USING THE SAME MEANS TO POWER AS THE CONSERVATIVE SAIC MAJORITY. AT THE SAME TIME IT IS VOCALLY ANTI-SYSTEM, ECHOING TO SOME DEGREE THE MORE RADICAL CONFIDENTIAL

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POLICIES OF THE NIC. ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE SAIC MEMBERSHIP IT "REJECTED" THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS, BUT LATER ADMITTED IT WOULD RUN CANDIDATES IN ANY INDIAN ELECTIONS "TO KEEP OUT GOVERNMENT STOOGES". IT IS EXPECTED TO WIN A MAJORITY WHICH IT THEN INTENDS TO USE TO PUSH THE SAG TOWARD MULTI-RACIAL REFORM THROUGH PRESSURE TACTICS FROM WITHIN. IN THE MEANTIMME, IT WILL SEEK FOR ITSELF AND, INDIRECTLY, THE INDIAN COMMUNITY, CLOSER TIES TO OTHER BLACKS THROUGH ITS VEHEMENT CRITICISM OF THE SAG AND MEMBERSHIP IN SABA.

7. IN THE SHORT TERM THE REFORM PARTY WILL WORK WITH SABA TO ATTEMPT TO FORCE THE SAG TO DEAL WITH IT AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF BLACK ASPIRATIONS. ALTHOUGH THE WEAKEST AND SMALLEST SABA MEMBER, REFORM PARTY MEMBERSHIP IS INTEGRAL TO SABA'S SUCCESS SINCE AS THE POTENTIAL VICTOR IN SAIC AND INDIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IT COULD BE A MAJOR BARRIER TO INDIAN INCORPORATION WITHIN THE SAG LAAGER. HOWEVER, LIKE ITS SABA PARTNERS, THE REFORM PARTY FACES A DIFFICULT FUTURE UNLESS ITS TACTICS BRING ABOUT SUBSTANTIAL CONCESSIONS AND/OR NEGOTIATIONS ON A NEW DISPENSATION FAIRLY SOON. FOR AS THE BLACK COMMUNITIES BECOME MORE RADICALIZED AND PRESSURES FOR CHANGE INCREASE, MODERATE AND NON-VIOLENT GROUPS LIKE SABA MAY SEE THEIR BLACK SUPPORT DECLINE PROPORTIONIATELY.

8. THE NATAL INDIAN CONGRESS: THE NIC APPEARS UNSURE HOW TO REACT TO THE NEW POLITICAL SITUATION BUT WILL LIKELY OPT FOR CONTINUED OUTRIGHT OPPOSITION TO THE NATIONAL PARTY AND NEW CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS, AND CONCENTRATE ON PROMOTING BLACK UNITY. TRADITIONALLY REPRESENTING LIBERAL TO RADICAL INDIAN OPINION, THE NIC WAS TEMPTED FOR A TIME TO JOIN SABA. A MAJORITY OF ITS EXECUTIVE FELT SABA WAS A POTENTIALLY POWERFUL GROUP WHICH ACCEPTED MANY NIC IDEALS, INCLUDING BLACK UNITY AND A MULTI-RACIAL NATIONAL CONVENTION TO FORMULATE A NEW CONFIDENTIAL

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DISPENSATION. THE NIC SOUNDED OUT SABA INTEREST IN NIC MEMBERSHIP AND, IN FEBRUARY, DECIDED AFTER A TUMULTUOUS EXECUTIVE MEETING TO JOIN IF INVITED. HOWEVER THE INCIDENT AT ROBERT SOBUKWE'S FUNERAL WHEN BLACK YOUTHS ATTACKED CHIEF BUTHELEZI, THE ONGOING ANIMOSITY BETWEEN BUTHELEZI AND THE (PROMINENT IN NIC) MEER FAMILY, AND AN APPARENT MISUNDERSTANDING (SABA WAITED FOR AN APPLICATION, NIC AN INVITATION) CAUSED THE NIC TO REVERSE ITSELF AND WAIT FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE CONSIDERING JOINING SABA (DURBAN 194).

9. IN THE SHORT TERM THE NIC WILL CONTINUE TO OPPOSE THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS AND WILL SEEK SUPPORT FOR THE "ANTI-SAIC COMMITTEE" (A GROUP LED BY NIC EXECUTIVE WHICH HAS HAD A NUMBER OF WELL-SUPPORTED PUBLIC MEETINGS). IF SABA CAN ORGANIZE A NATIONAL CONVENTION OR TAKE OTHER STEPS IN AGREEMENT WITH NIC POLICY, THE LATTER WILL UNDOUBTEDLY COOPERATE. HOWEVER, AS THE ONLY MAJOR ANTI-SAG GROUP OUTSIDE THE SYSTEM, THE NIC REMAINS COMMITTED TO "IDEOLOGICAL PURITY" AND FREEDOM FROM THE TAINT OF SAG COOPERATION. NEVERTHELESS ITS ISOLATION COULD EVENTUALLY DRIVE IT TO A GREATER DEGREE OF COOPERATION WITH SABA OR AN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATION. IT IS EVEN WITHIN THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY THAT IT MIGHT RUN CANDIDATES IN THE SAIC OR INDIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON A "DISRUPTION PLATFORM" EQUIVALENT TO (OR IN CONJUNCTION WITH) THE REFORM PARTY.

10. CONCLUSION: THE INDIANS POSITION IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL MAELSTROM NECESSARILY WILL LIMIT THEIR FREEDOM OF ACTION IN THE FUTURE. MOST MAJOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL FORCES BOTH BLACK AND WHITE, LEGAL AND ILLEGAL, ARE BEYOND THEIR CONTROL OR INFLUENCE. THE FEW ASSETS THEY HAVE, E.G. THE DESIRE BY WHITES AND AFRICANS FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND THEIR GOOD RELATIONS WITH WHITES THROUGH THE SAIC MAJORITY, WITH INKATHA THROUGH THE REFORM PARTY, AND WITH BLACK RADICALS THROUGH THE NIC, ARE LARGELY DISCOUNTABLE BECAUSE OF THE COMMUNITY'S BASICALLY SMALL NUMBERS (750,000). INCREASINGLY THE SAG MAY ECHO MP VILJOEN IN DEMANDING SIGNS OF INDIAN CONFIDENTIAL

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REJECTION OF BLACK UNITY AND ACCEPTANCE OF A PLACE IN THE LAAGER. THE INDIANS MAY EVENTUALLY HAVE LITTLE LEVERAGE LEFT TO PARLAY THE SAG'S DESIRE FOR SUPPORT INTO FURTHER COMPROMISES. THE AFRICAN, RADICALIZED BY INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES, INCREASINGLY MAY DEMAND AN EQUAL AND OPPOSITE REACTION AND A COMMITMENT TO MORE RADICAL ACTION. FOR THE INDIAN COMMUNITY ITSELF, THE MAIN CONCERN IS A SECURE SOUTH AFRICAN FUTURE NO MATTER WHAT THE NATURE OF THE GOVERNMENT. MOST INDIANS REALIZE THAT A FULL COMMITMENT TO EITHER SIDE NOW COULD BE DISASTROUS. THUS, INTERNALLY DIVIDED AND SUBJECT TO PRESSURES THEY FIND DIFFICULT TO DEFLECT OR CONTROL, THE INDIANS ARE UNABLE POLITICALLY TO SATISFY EITHER WHITE OR BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS WITHOUT ALIENATING THE OTHER. AS A RESULT THEIR CHOSEN "STRATEGY" IS TO KEEP, THROUGH THEIR POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS, CLOSE TIES TO BOTH WHITES AND BLACKS, BUT COMMIT THEMSELVES OPENLY TO NEITHER. WHILE THIS WILL NOT BRING THEM THE SECURITY THEY CRAVE, IT WILL KEEP THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF OPTIONS OPEN LONGER AND HOPEFULLY PRESERVE THEIR ABILITY TO ADAPT TO WHATEVER THE FUTURE BRINGS. AS A UNIQUE MINORITY IN A UNIQUE SITUATION, THEY PROBABLY HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE.

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